



The Magical Story of Penny and Chad Juros

A story that will inspire us all to count our blessings

We look forward to what 2007 will bring to us, both the good and the bad, as trials and triumphs await us in the new year. When life and its demands seem to overwhelm you, we suggest you remember the story of Penny and Chad Juros, recent visitors to the island thanks to Mike Eman of AVP, as a lesson to us all in living positively, despite the worst that life can throw at you.

Mike contacted Chad and his mother Penny after he saw Chad on Criss Angel's Mind Freak television show. Their story is a story of living through the worst nightmare, and turning adversity into a positive purpose of bringing joy to others, and benefits to their community and the world. It is a story to teach us all to appreciate how fortunate we are, and to count our blessings every day.

Eighteen-year-old Chad is a magician, and while in Aruba, he did a number of free performances for the less fortunate, and a year-end show for the children of the members of the AVP political party and any children that cared to attend. When Mike Eman saw Chad on TV, he was determined that he bring them to Aruba so islanders could learn his inspiring story.

Penny granted THE NEWS an in-depth interview before they left the island to return to their home in New Jersey, and her ebullience and positive outlook on life is an example for each of us. Her life was perfect until the age of thirty-two, with Donald, her wonderful husband that she adored, and her two children, Faith and Chad. It is Penny's belief that all of us have an amazing story, but her story is exceptional. When Chad was three, he was diagnosed with an aggressive and deadly leukemia. Doctors informed his parents that he had a 5% chance of survival.

After months of chemotherapy, he was pronounced in remission, to the great relief of his parents. His father Donald, a dentist, kept him distracted during numerous painful tests, such as bone marrow aspirations, with magic. By performing magic tricks, he helped his little boy through those terrible moments, and inspired him to take up magic, and practicing magic helped Chad while away the hours in the hospital.

After being pronounced cured, four years later in 1995 Chad had a relapse at the age of seven, a moment Penny describes "as feeling like being pushed from a plane without a parachute." They were told the only remedy was a matching bone marrow transplant from a sibling, but they were not fortunate, and Faith did not match. Thus began a seventeen-month habitation of the Oncology Ward of the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia for Chad and his mother, who moved in with him and was by his side during devastating chemo treatments with experimental drugs. Chad suffered cardiac arrest on more than one occasion, and was a number of times in a coma. All during that time, his parents constantly spoke to him to keep his mind working and alert, his father always performing and teaching him new magic tricks. Penny truly believes that magic saved Chad's life, and he focused on it nearly every waking moment.

Penny considers Chad a "living miracle," and he did set medical history by surviving and being declared cured eight years ago. Penny often wonders if the Lord was listening to their prayers, and if her husband Donald prayed, as any loving parent would, "Please God, take me instead of my child. Take me and let him live." Three months after he brought his son home, Donald, an outstanding athlete, collapsed and was diagnosed with a malignant brain tumor. Thus began another fifteen-month bedside vigil for Penny, this time without a happy ending.

Donald was in and out of various hospitals for chemotherapy, but quickly succumbed to the inoperable tumor. "I held in my arms what had become a three-month-old baby in a forty-year-old body," reveals Penny. After months of treatment at the Duke University Hospital, dubbed by Penny as "The brain tumor treatment capital of the world" the doctors informed her that Donald's case was hopeless. Penny took him home and she and her children sat by his bedside and asked Donald his dying wishes. He expressed a wish for each of them; for his children, he wished to see Faith attend his Alma Mater of Rutgers, New Brunswick, where she now attends school, and for Chad to use his magic to help others, and so he and Penny started the "Spread the Magic Foundation." Penny told Don that these were not *his* dying wish, they were his wishes for *them*, and what did *he* want?

Don's last wish was to see his son a Bar Mitzvah, and so Chad, who was only eleven at the time, received special training from their Rabbi, a close friend of the family. Chad's sister Faith, who had been a Bat Mitzvah, assisted, and five weeks later his father saw him called to the Biemah to do his Haftorah. His

wish granted, he managed to dance with his wife and children one last time, and then almost immediately sank into a permanent coma.

Penny admits that such events of course made her cry and scream, “Why God? Why? Why my wonderful son and husband; why our family?” During Don’s final months in a coma in a hospice, where she laid next him in his bed from 4:00 A.M until midnight every day, she would often stop by the beach near their home and watch the waves and ponder these questions. She would spend her time talking to her comatose husband, reading him the paper, always letting him know he was not alone. One last time, when she took a short break and left the room, she returned to find her husband sitting up in bed, eyes open and lucid, happy to see her walk into the room. “Where have you been?” he asked. “Um, just down the hall for a moment” was all she could respond, and then the Rabbi asked. “Don? Do you know who this is?” “Sure,” he answered affectionately, “That’s Pennybabe, my wifey for lifey.”

The Rabbi told Don that they were going to say the healing prayer for him, and asked if he knew his Jewish name, and he gave the name “Chiam David,” which was the name of his son. When Penny and the Rabbi corrected him, Don answered, “Pray for Chad, there is no hope left for me,” and with those words closed his eyes for the last time, and was gone soon after.

Penny, Chad and Faith have survived their heartbreaking experience, and it has spurred them on to help others in the same predicament in a various ways. The work of their “Spread the Magic Foundation” honors Don’s wishes by bringing joy to children’s wards and hospices, and raised funds for children’s cancer research. Chad has been invited by George and Laura Bush to perform at the Easter Egg Roll at White House since 2004. If you check their website, www.MagicalChad.com, you will see he is solidly booked to perform for the next six months. Penny expressed that they hope to return to Aruba after that, during the summer break, because besides being a magician, Chad is a full time college student.

Now, Penny says, “It is all good, Chad has his health, so nothing else is important, every day is a gift.” Mother and children are very close, and she admonishes everyone to “appreciate all you have and count your blessings, because I know how easily and quickly they can be ripped away from you, and life can change.” Important lessons for us to all consider, and to realize how fortunate we are, as Penny and her children consider themselves fortunate. Before dying, Don advised Penny that if she needed to, she could send him an e-mail, and he would get the message, wherever he was, and so she does that everyday. Over the years, those e-mails have become a manuscript she titled “Cherish Yesterday, Dream Tomorrow, and Live Today,” her motto she keeps posted in her kitchen. She hopes to see it published, to inspire others to be aware of how blessed they are, and to learn to “not sweat the small stuff” as she and her children have done.

Therefore, when you are feeling “stressed and depressed,” consider Penny and Chad, and give thanks for all you have!